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How Raising The Minimum Wage Is A Racial Justice Issue



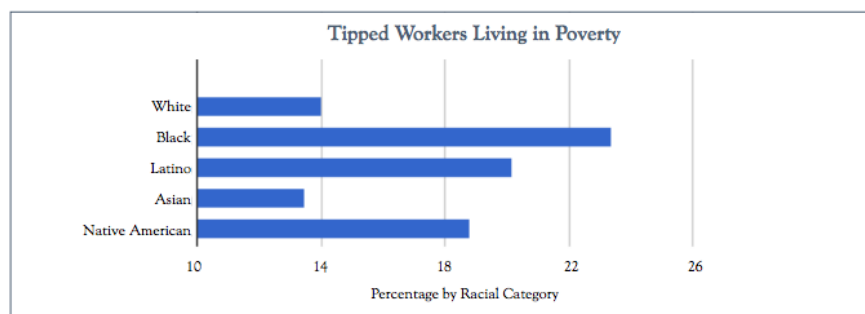
Three and a half million people of color would be lifted out of poverty if Congress raised the minimum wage to \$10.10, according to a new report from the restaurant workers' group ROC United. They would be the majority of the six million people overall who would be lifted out of poverty. People of color are far more likely to work minimum wage jobs, as they represent 42 percent of those earners even though they make up just 32 percent of the workforce.

That big number is in large part thanks to the overrepresentation of people of color in low-wage restaurant industry jobs. Over 500,000 of those lifted out of poverty by a raise in the minimum wage would be restaurant workers, 300,000 of whom would be workers of color.



Restaurants are the single largest employer of people of color, but they are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest paying positions. As the report notes, “Two of the lowest-paying jobs, dishwashers and fast food preps and cooks, are 59% and 35% people of color, and earn a median wage of \$8.78 and \$8.85, respectively.” Forty percent of tipped workers—who make an even lower minimum wage of \$2.13—are people of color.

The people of color who hold these jobs are also more likely to live in poverty. They make up more than half of tipped workers and restaurant workers with incomes below the poverty line.



Women of color fare even worse. “Black female servers, for example, are paid only 60 percent of what all male servers are paid,” the report notes.

The minimum wage has fallen far below its historical borrowing power. The current wage would be \$10.40 if it had been indexed to inflation at its peak in 1968.

House Democrats introduced a bill in March that would raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour and index it to inflation so that it would continue to rise. House Republicans unanimously voted it down later that month. Yet 65 Republicans currently serving in the House or Senate supported an increase in the minimum wage when Bush signed it into law in 2007.